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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2008

In Today's Papers

High Military Council Chooses Basbug as New TGS Chief
All news outlets report the results of the High Military Council (YAS) meetings which ended August 4. YAS decided that General Ilker Basbug, commander of the Land Forces, will replace General Yasar Buyukanit as the chief of the military General Staff (TGS) who retires on August 30. Basbug will serve a two-year term before he reaches the mandatory retirement age in 2010. At that point, he will be replaced by the newly-appointed Land Forces Commander General Isik Kosaner. General Avni Atilla Isik was named the new Gendarme Commander; Ergin Saygun was named the First Army Commander; Hasan Igsiz was named the new Deputy Chief of the TGS, and Necdet Ozel was named the new commander of the Second Army. Naval Forces Commander Admiral Metin Atac and Air Forces Commander Aydogan Babaoglu's positions were extended for one year.

Papers report the outcome of the meeting as a surprise because YAS did not expel anyone from the military on grounds of disciplinary and/or fundamentalist activities this year. Papers speculate that decision was reached in response to speculations that military officers implicated in the 'Ergenekon' probe would be expelled. A column in the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak speculates the new Gendarme Commander, Atilla Isik, may be named the Land Forces Commander when General Kosaner takes over from Basbug, which is likely to make him next in line to be TGS chief. The same column claims, "General Basbug has decided to give the control of the critical gendarme intelligence organization to his close aide Isik."

Mainstream papers expect Basbug to keep the military away from politics. Papers, however, comment it would not be surprising to see Basbug flex his muscle in the event the "red lines" of the Turkish military, including secularism and the unitary structure of the republic, are crossed during his term.

Editorial Commentary on the High Military Council (YAS) Decisions

"The Process of Cooling and Restructuring Continues in the Military"

Murat Yetkin comments in liberal Radikal (8/5): "This year PM Erdogan only attended a couple of hours of the Supreme Military

Council (YAS) meeting. Erdogan passed his responsibilities to Chief of General Staff (TGS) General Buyukanit and did not attend the rest of the meetings. The promotions and the assignments announced during the YAS meetings indicate that the process of cooling and restructuring continues in the military. A new period is starting in the military - none of the new commanders actively lived through the May 27, 1960 military coup. The new TGS Chief Ilker Basbug graduated from the war academy in 1962, which means he is the only commander who can remember the war academy during the 1960s. During this process, we should all realize that the Turkish military will respond to accusations regarding the Ergenekon case and will try to cast away those who have created problems. The new assignments also indicate that military is undergoing a vast restructuring. Of course, these changes are not easy to implement."

"Were there no expulsions on the YAS Agenda?"
Mustafa Mutlu asks in mainstream Vatan (8/5): "The Supreme Military Council meetings concluded yesterday and for the first time since 1996, no one was expelled from the military. Until now, YAS convened twice a year and at almost every meeting dozens of military personnel were expelled for fundamentalist activities or undisciplined behaviors. There are two possible reasons for the decision not to expel anyone at this meeting. First, expulsions from the military will, from now on, be decided by only the military courts. Second, expulsions could lead to speculations of connections with the Ergenekon case. No matter what the justification is, this YAS meeting signals a new era in relations between the military and the government. I hope this will prove to be a positive development."

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"YAS"

Bekir Coskun wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (8/5): "Because of the Constitutional Court's decision to keep the AKP open, everyone expects Erdogan will change, but why should he change now? He hasn't changed during the last six years; he was elected PM twice and never changed; he carried Turkey into crisis maybe thirty times and never changed; his activities nearly resulted in the closure of his party and he never changed ... Why should a person change when his party is not closed? While we were waiting for him to change, we missed other changes around us. This year, no military personnel were expelled because of their fundamentalist activities. Because of this decision, the PM, who has also been accused of fundamentalist activities, did not have to approve or disapprove any of the YAS decisions! It is interesting to see that as fundamentalist activities are increasing in every corner of Turkey, fundamentalist activities have suddenly disappeared from the military. While retired generals are in jail for supporting Ataturk's secularist principles, why don't you see any fundamentalist activities? Well, this is the change we all missed while we were observing the PM and waiting for him to change."

Forest Fires in Antalya under Control

All news outlets report the forest fires which broke out in the Mediterranean province of Antalya on July 31 are now under control. These fires destroyed more than 4,000 hectares of woodlands and caused over 2 million YTL in damage. The fires destroyed more than 60 houses, dozens of farming buildings, a school and a mosque in the towns of Manavgat and Serik. Six villages were evacuated. Two people were killed in the fire which also destroyed livestock in the villages and millions of trees in the woodlands.

Ahmadinejad's Turkey Visit Date Unclear

Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Foreign Minister Ali Babacan held a joint press conference with visiting Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado in Ankara on Monday.

Asked about the prospective visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad to Turkey, Babacan said details such as the time, place and format of the visit were "not important." In addition, he said, "Attention should be put on the essence of the visit. Such unnecessary details cast a shadow on the essence and success of the visit," said Babacan. Press had speculated that Ankara was working to arrange a "working visit" for Ahmadinejad in Istanbul when the Iranian President declined to visit Ataturk's mausoleum in Ankara. Mainstream Sabah says on August 14, Ahmadinejad will go to Istanbul

and depart on August 15 after performing Friday prayers in the city.

Erdogan to Meet Assad in Bodrum

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report on Tuesday, Prime Minister Erdogan and his wife Emine will meet Syrian President Bashar Assad in Turkey's Aegean coastal town of Bodrum where Assad is vacationing with his wife. The two leaders will reportedly talk about regional problems, Iran, and Israel-Syria talks. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Erdogan's advisor Ahmet Davutoglu will join the meeting. Later in the day, Erdogan will travel to the areas stricken by raging forest fires over the past five days in Antalya.

TV News:

CNN Turk

Domestic News

- The Health Ministry set up a special committee to investigate the deaths of newborn babies in a hospital in Ankara. In the last month, 49 newborn babies have died in the hospital.

- Security forces arrested 132 illegal immigrants -- most of them from Iraq, Georgia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mauritania, Bangladesh, India and Burma -- in operations in the northwestern provinces of

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Edirne, Canakkale and Sakarya.

- According to a report by the Prime Ministry's Human Rights Desk, 7,183 children went missing in 2007 and the whereabouts of 833 children are still unknown. The report says missing children could be in the hands of the mafia or terror organizations.

International News

- Iran's official IRNA news agency quotes the chief of the Revolutionary Guards as saying Iran has tested a "new naval weapon" with a range of 300 km.

- China's official Xinhua News Agency says an attack on a border patrol station on the country's western frontier killed 16 police officers.

WILSON